New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1957

Volume XVIII, Number 18 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of October 21, 1957

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Copper and Brass"

Journal-American

October 18, 1957

Nancy Walker Runs Away With Musical

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE ARE A great many beguiling moments in "Copper and Brass," the new musical which opened at the Martin Beck Theatre last night; there are sprightly youngsters engaged in jive, there are a couple of durable ballads, and there are rashers of laughs supplied by the utterly engaging and undisciplined Nancy Walker.

The show moves; it is brilliantly mounted with a series of imaginative sets by William and Jean Eckart. But I'm afraid the minus moments overwhelm the plus; it doesn't add up in my compendium to a success.

The book itself leaves a lot to be desired, and the musical numbers are not uniformly distinguished. The story of a Manhattan lady cop provides ample opportunity for Miss Walker's antics, but there are dry stretches when she is not involved.

The proceedings come fitfully to life in a blistering number called "Don't Look Now" toward the end of the first stanza, and there is appeal and poignancy in "You Walked Out," presented by Dick Williams.

I enjoyed "INeed All the Help I Can Get," and Benay Venuta did her talented best with "Bringing Up Daughter" and "Hong Kong," but the David Baker-David Craig score is not generally star-crossed.

The rock and roll episode, "Baby's Baby," was a suitable tribute to Bob Fosse, who came in late in the show's preparation—unhappily, too late. Individual efforts were proffered by Alice Pearce, always a reliable commedienne, by Alan Bunce, Norma Douglas, Peter Conlow, Evelyn Russell, Michele Burke, Doreen McLean, Byron Mitchell, Bruce Mackay and Doug Rogers.

There is doubtless an excellent idea somewhere in the tale of an inept New York policewoman, and Miss Walker is one of the funniest women alive, in or out of uniform. But here she doesn't get the proper support from the rest of the force.

"COPPER AND BRASS"

Musical comedy in two acts with book by Ellen Violett and David Craig; lyrics by Mr. Craig; music by David Baker; staged by Marc Daniels; choreography by Anna Sokolow; scenery and lighting by William and Jean Eckart; costumes by Alvin Colt; musical direction and vocal arrangements by Maurice Levine; orchestrations by Ralph Burns; presented by Lyn Austin and Thomas Noyes in association with Anderson Lawler at the Martin Beck Theatre, October 17, 1957. The cast:

Controller.....Byron Mitchell
Katey O'Shea....Nancy Walker
Captain.....Alan Bunce
Sergeant.....Bruce Mackay
Ethel Potts.....Michele Burke
Mary Potts.....Evelyn Russell
Estelle O'Shea....Benay Venuta
Mrs. Morphky...Doreen McLean
Brains.....Peter Conlow
Brawn.....Norma Douglas
Principal.....Alice Pearce
George.....Dick Williams
Limey.....Hank Jones
Slam.....Doug Rogers
Professor.....Ernie Furtado
Traintime.....Frank Rehak

DAILY NEWS

October 18, 1957

Nancy Walker Carries Big Show, 'Copper & Brass,' as Easy as Pie

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Copper and Brass," which opened last evening at the Martin Beck, is a great big musical full of songs, dances and scenery, and you wouldn't think a little woman like Nancy Walker could handle it. You wouldn't, that is, if you didn't know Nancy. She can lug around a show of any size and weight with one arm tied behind her.

When Miss Walker is in charge, "Copper and Brass" is delightful and delovely. She plays a rookie policewoman, and her first assignment is to put down juvenile delinquency in a cool jazz dive across from a public school. She makes a thorough mess of this job without half trying and goes on to her next post.

Miss Walker is the kind of cop who can get snarled up in the leather thong of her nightstick. You should see her coming down the iron ladder on her second assignment, which is directing traffic in the Holland Tunnel. Nothing like it since W. C. Fields had a grim tussle with a cello.

Clever Settings

And so goes the happiest part of the evening — Miss Walker trying to get out of an evening cape or braving the jaws of a modernistic womb chair like an alligator wrestler. As a comedienne she is peerless, but as a leading lady she is not. She is far too capable to take seriously the mush of the ordinary musical comedy romance — a romance which in this case has her falling in love with a jazz band leader.

William and Jean Eckart's settings are expansive and devilish clever as they picture today's Manhattan, from its cellar dives and police stations to its new half-pint-size apartments and its buildings under construction.

Frantic Material

The company of "Copper and Brass" is a large one and it includes such talented performers as Dick Williams (the band leader), Benay Venuta, Alice Pearce (who plays a schoolteacher, natch) and Alan Bunce. The dances, staged by Anna Sokolow, are generally frantic, but there is an interpolated number directed by Bob Fosse which has style and humor.

The music and lyrics, by David Baker and David Craig, respectively, are on the frantic side, too. I feared that the first trumpet in Maurice Levine's excellent orchestra would blow a gasket ere the evening ended, but he survived. The one song I fancied was "Don't Look Now."

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
October 18, 1957

THEATER

'Copper and Brass'

By WALTER KERR

EVERY time Nancy Walker can get her busy colleagues at the Martin Beck to agree to a few seconds' silence—no lyrics, no dialogue, just a brief, precious vacuum to be inventively filled—the results are lovely.

Watch her slow things down to a magnificient standstill during a session in the Holland Tunnel. Librettists Ellen Violett and David Craig have imagined their lady as a less than talented policewoman, and they have—after a couple of random introductory scenes—demoted her to traffic patrol somewhere under the river.

Everything stops cold while Miss Walker simply climbs a ladder, perspiring hand over perspiring hand, her beleaguered countenance contorted into a dazzling array of unspoken epithets. The other actors are still standing around, their tongues mercifully tied and their eyes popping, as Miss Walker descends the same ladder—this time with toes gracefully pointed while her fists grip a greasy rail—to her perch beside the oncoming traffic.

The oncoming traffic, invisible but noisy, hurls our unsteady heroine flat and flailing against vast cement walls. She teeters over the road bed, descends into the maelstrom, blows a hasty whistle, and watches in innocent, gratified awe as screeching trucks pile up in the distance. Between errors, she finds time to involve herself with a tenacious telephone cord, a piece of business she has lovingly mastered before. It's all filler, and it's all exceedingly fine.

The trouble with "Copper and Brass" is that the librettists were hired to write a book, which they have done, the team of David Baker and David Craig were asked to provide a score, which they have also done, and the lot of them are now naturally anxious that their work be heard.

Hearing it interferes seriously with one's pleasure in the solemn, lonely, private humors of the star. The lyrics don't even try to keep up with her: the nearest they get to trying for fun is to suggest, in a number about lady cops, that "a pinch don't mean what it should mean." The story, detailing Miss Walker's efforts to keep a rather sheepish young clarinetist out of the clutches of the law, wanders vainly from locker-rooms to police lineups to the Staten Island ferry in eternal and unsuccessful pursuit of a suitable blackout. The silences that are filled with our girl's grimaces are rewarding; the silences that greet the jokes are simply eerie.

It is further possible that, though the show was written for her, Miss Walker has been miscast—at least musically. Murderous lyric parodies for this genius to grapple with? Not a sign of them, unless you want to count a lame little ditty labeled "I Need All the Help I Can Get."

Mostly, the damaging diseuse is asked to humidly over the standard romantic plaints of "Me and Love," "It's an Unmistakable Sign," and "Don't Look Now" (don't look now, don't stop to think, can it be we're on the brink?), all of which adds up to an appalling waste of one of our richer, more lunatic, talents. Let ingenues be dreary while the violins play; Miss Walker deserves good red meat.

Benay Venuta, wonderfully willing, manages to smile right through a two-chorus stagewait called "Bringing Up Daughter." Choreographer Anna Sokolow mysteriously peoples a Staten Island ferry at 5 a. m. with unemployed ballet dancers to no great effect, and it remains for Bob Fosse to interpolate the one really lively, and more or less shaped, fandango in "Baby's Baby." Designers William and Jean Eckart continue their romance with architecture—most successfully—in sketching out the girders and jail-cells of an otherwise uninteresting city. Alice Pearce is loyal as a Public School principal under bird's-nest wig.

At one point in the proceedings Miss Walker gets herself throttled by a mile-long fox fur. The fur she can handle; it's the script that's strifling.

New York Post
October 18, 1957

TWO on the AISLE

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

A Show Called 'Copper and Brass'

Don't say that "Copper and Brass" fails to provide its own warning. You would expect a musical comedy with such a name to be loud, raucous and, of course, brassy, and, whatever charges may be leveled against the proceedings which opened last night at the Martin Beck Theater, they can't be accused of not living up to that title. In fact, they adhere to it far too faithfully. Accepting all the noise as part of the game, I still accuse the new show of unfairness to Nancy Walker.

As a fairly recent convert to the comic art of Miss Walker, and, therefore, all the more zealous on her behalf, I had hoped for a vehicle that would give play to her heroic capacity for fierce and outraged humor. At one point in the evening, she has to do battle with a recalcitrant modern chair, and here she has a challenge worthy of her steel. But the episode is minor and doesn't last very long, and she is wasted the rest of the time in a role that isn't her type.

The Policewoman

I wouldn't go so far as to say "Copper and Brass" would have been a satisfactory show if Judy Holliday had been cast in the leading part. Nothing, I feel sure, could have saved it. But the character of an ineffectual policewoman, whose career seems about to be blasted because she falls in love with a presumably romantic clarinet player, strikes me as far more suited to Miss Holliday's wistful hilarity than to Miss Walker's superb distaste for almost everything.

While the neglect of all that is most delightful in its star's distinguished talent is the major sin of the new show, it has infinitely more defects than mere negligence. Even granting that the plot premise has possibilities, its current treatment is entirely without freshness or imagination, and almost entirely without humor. For all the eagerness of the young dancers, its choreography is strangely commonplace, and so, I fear, are David Craig's lyrics.

Nor can I say much more for David Baker's music. There is an agreeably tuneful song called "Don't Look Now," and, as a playgoer not without nostalgia, I was entertained by a number in which Benay Venuta sings about the famous dances of the past, but that is about all. No one can say, though, that the show is ashamed of its score. It is played and sung loudly if not beautifully.

Miss Walker is not one to be thrown completely by her material, and she is funny, not only when battling that chair, but also when singing a hypocritical song of surrender to her clarinet player. The only others who have anything to do are Miss Venuta as the heroine's mother, Dick Williams as the musician, Alan Bunce as an outraged police captain, and Alice Pearce as a teacher. I guess they're all right, and I liked the sets by William and Jean Eckart. But "Copper and Brass"!

The New York Times
October 18, 1957

Theatre: Police Action

Nancy Walker Stars in 'Copper and Brass'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

MEMBERS of the Nancy Walker Association will now have to adopt a new constitution and elect a new set of officers. "Copper and Brass," in which she appeared at the Martin Beck last evening, proves that the present policy is not working at all.

In 1956 her clowning in Noel Coward's "Fallen Angels" seemed to be only a holding operation that kept her in business until something suitable could be prepared. But now it appears that casting her in a part for which she was grotesquely unsuitable was a stroke of genius. Her high-society grimaces, her unsteady savoir-faire and her tangle in a long telephone line in Mr. Coward's polished study of sin was a good deal more hilarious than the musical show that has now been assembled in her interest.

•

"Copper and Brass" is a standard, old-fashioned show with a breathlessly unfunny book, uninteresting music, unlovely ballets and a general look of banality and routine. You would think that nothing in the field of musical comedy had changed since the theatre went bankrupt in the Nineteen Thirties.

The notion of presenting Miss Walker as a lady cop has merit, particularly when she appears in an ill-fitting uniform, with an oversize police cap lounging on one side of her head. A gnome-like creature who can strut as boldly as if she were eight feet tall, Miss Walker makes a promising beginning when she swings a regulation billy and scares herself half to death firing a warning shot in the air.

But the "Copper and Brass" smiths then proceed to involve her in a stereotyped romance with a jazz-band leader, handicapping her with the usual sticky songs and moonlight rhapsodies. She does what she can with all this old bric-a-brac. But there is very little room left for her uproarious gaucheries—for her comic assumptions of a grandeur she does not possess, for the smile that is half way between a squint and a snarl, for her humorous failures as a member of a society that is forever whirling beyond her.

There is nothing in "Copper and Brass" as painfully funny as her low comedy antics in "Phoenix '55" when everything written and staged was just right for her.

•

Even a dull musical show represents a lot of hard work and hope. This column dutifully salutes the intentions. Alice Pearce, who seems to have less chin every season, shrieks and shoves her way through the book as an amusing school principal. Benay Venuta barges around with obliging good nature as the distraught mother of a lady cop; and any number of willing troupers dance and sing by rote.

But there is no use pretending that "Copper and Brass" is of any use to Miss Walker or to the members of her Association. Something will have to be done.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun
October 18, 1957

Nancy Walker Cops Laughs

By FRANK ASTON.

Considered in the bits that make its whole, "Copper and Brass," which opened at the Martin Beck last evening, should be a winner. It has Nancy Walker. She's a career girl who unintentionally becomes one of New York's female finest.

Miss Walker fumbles her night stick. She creates bumper-to-bumper traffic in the Holland Tunnel by causing a wreck. As a sleuth disguised in evening clothes, she practically strangles herself with an interminable stole. She establishes a shambles trying to set up housekeeping in a one-and-a-half-room midtown apartment. In a split gown to end all split gowns she sings a siren song in a way that would abash a siren. Miss Walker, of course, is one of our leading clowns.

Dependable Funster.

The show has Benay Venuta, trustworth funster; Alice Pearce, who can get a giggle merely by looking across the lights; Dick Williams, for a light serving of song and romance, and virtually a regiment of other people for the work that keeps coming up in musicals.

There are several group dances on the gymnastic order, all done with the vigor and talent characteristic of today's youth. The show has songs. Miss Walker and Miss Venuta almost hit the oldtime soft shoe routine in "Unmistakable Sign." Miss Walker and Mr. Williams have a couple pleasant go-arounds with something known as "Don't Look Now." And Miss Venuta catches on fairly well with a chocolate coated number, "Sweet William."

Show Stopper.

In the tune groove, however, nothing came close to Miss Walker's triumph with "Little Woman." The audience didn't want to let her stop.

"Copper and Brass" apparently has the ingredients. But, aside from Miss Walker herself, there is thin humor. The story of a lady copper falling for a combo man in a cellar is no heart wringer. The music seldom rises above the ordinary. So let it be sadly recorded that "Copper and Brass" just does not make the grade.

Daily Mirror

October 18, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN

'Copper, Brass' Is Leaden

Nancy Walker is one of the funniest women in the world. She deserves the best, and too seldom gets it. The scripters and composers just don't seem to be able to fit her with material worthy of her talents. Take "Copper and Brass," for instance, the Martin Beck's new tenant.

Nancy towers over it like the Statue of Liberty over Bedloe's Island. She almost makes its dated jests sparkle like gems, its pedestrian songs sound like Hit Paraders. This great femme clown has a Chaplinesque approach to comedy. With lifted eyebrow, a curl of the lip, a shrug of the shoulder and her duck-like waddle, she is guaranteed to garner laughs with any old "sides" they hand her.

"COPPER AND BRASS," in case you'd like to know, has to do with an unorthodox romance between a rookie policewoman and a cool jazz musician. It all starts when she's sent to case his jumping joint, which has been responsible for a lot of absentees from a nearby high school.

Before it's all over, Nancy has turned the Commissioner's hair whiter via her well-meaning attempts to become one of the Force's Finest. She's demoted and promoted with kaleidoscopic rapidity, until she finally tosses in her badge for those ever-popular strains from "Lohengrin."

Though "Copper and Brass" is as old-fashioned as a washboard, it has some hilarious moments, thanks to the inspired lunacy of our Nancy. The first-nighters—include us among 'em—almost ripped the seats from the Beck's sturdy concrete foundation, howling at her attempts to straighten out traffic in the Holland Tunnel.

Dick Williams, who used to be one of Kay Thompson's favorite Williams Brothers in the niteries, has a smooth way with a song or a love line. Alice Pearce, as a bewildered school principal, makes the most of matters that come to her attention. Alan Bunce, as a harassed cops' captain of the old school, demonstrates skill at foiling for the funsters.

Benay Venuta, a top-flight trouper, can capitalize on a gag with the best of them, and sell chansons, modern and nostalgic, with persuasion. Norma Douglas, a refugee from the Steinway grand, and Peter Conlow, a lithe and dynamic young stepper, make a Bob Fosse take-off on rock 'n' roll sizzle.

BUT IT IS Nancy Walker who really comes off triumphant in this fumbling frolic from the pens of Ellen Violett, David Craig and David Baker. She takes their spurious coinage and makes it ring like the real stuff.

But, for all Miss Walker's wizardry, "Copper and Brass" is not likely to cop any prizes — or much "brass" — for producers Lyn Austin, Thomas Noyes and Anderson Lawler. Even the late Houdini couldn't turn that trick.

"Nature's Way"

New York Herald Tribune

October 17, 1957

THEATER

'Nature's Way'

By WALTER KERR

HERMAN WOUK is in favor of motherhood, chastity, male virility, "Saturday Evening Post" covers, fresh air plus all the other virtues you care to name, and he doesn't care what bad taste he uses to defend them.

Indeed, as "Nature's Way" steers its course through a hothouse New York world in which effiminates wiggle fingers at each other across the martinis while a very "modern" baby-doctor gets every detail of a pregnancy wrong, the furious new farce at the Coronet provides us with what may be a new rule for the writing of satire. The subjects satirized ought to strike the satirist, personally, as funny.

I have a powerful suspicion that none of author Wouk's current targets really joggle his funny bone, that he is actually filled with a considerable, dead-serious distaste for young men named Vivian, for childbirth without ether, for penthouse apartments studded with Picassos, and for Broadway plays in which incest makes the world go round.

This earnest dislike—if I am not guilty of some faulty mind-reading—leads him into two devious practices. Since he is actually sober about his materials, he must manufacture a comic attitude, must plaster the "humor" on top of them.

We are, as a result, confronted with fashionable white-washed brick walls that are "built to last" tumbling symbolically down on a fat-headed impresario, with the spectacle of a lavender librettist actually knitting, with tranquilizing pills that slow their takers to an idiot mumble, and with trowel-tooled housekeeping jokes about "How to turn your old cesspool into a game room." Lacking true zest for the mockery, Mr. Wouk must resort to hard labor.

• • •

The second trap he would seem to have fallen into is that haunting fear of being thought old-fashioned in his admiration for clean living. This leads him to pile on the smartness, outflip the flippant, reassure us that he knows what's what by spelling out the naughty words and naughtier habits of a "delightfully corrupt" society in big, blatant, block capitals. No homosexual joke, new or old, is going to escape Mr. Wouk's all-inclusive net.

• • •

More's the pity, because the author of "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial" makes it perfectly clear in the first fifteen minutes of the evening that he could write a first-rate, genuinely funny, domestic comedy if he put his mind to it.

As Orson Bean and Betsy von Furstenberg begin snapping at each other in mangled Freudian terms—she is sure his inability to digest breakfast eggs is sexually symbolic, he is certain her recurring hiccoughs are signs of galloping frigidity—the writing is deft, friendly, and spontaneously amusing. Mr. Bean's earnest helpfulness as he explains to his wife what a mess pregnancy has made of her is wonderfully droll; Miss von Furstenberg's drowsy announcement that her favorite exercise is rolling in money works just as well. Both of these players are turning into enormously skilled light farceurs.

• • •

There's nothing wrong, either, with the unconventional casting of Audrey Christie as a cactus - bearing grandmother from Tucson, with Robert Emhardt's headlong effort to make a pediatrician antically absurd, or with Edmon Ryan's level-headed playing of a sensible soul among the decadents. Most unconvincing of the evening's impostures — and this may be a compliment — is Scott McKay's struggle to seem suitably minty (if that's an acceptable word).

I haven't much doubt that a good many of Mr. Wouk's complaints are valid ones. But the joyous glee, and underlying affection for erring humanity, that distinguish even the most savage satire are missing.

"NATURE'S WAY"

Comedy in two acts and three scenes by Herman Wouk; staged by Alfred de Liagre Jr.; settings and lighting by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Frank Thompson; presented by Mr. de Liagre at the Coronet Theatre, October 16, 1957. The cast:

Billy Turk.....Orson Bean
Butler...Godfrey M. Cambridge
Maggie Turk.....
Betsy von Furstenberg
Mr. Chaney.....James Arenton
Nadine Fesser...Beatrice Arthur
Vivian Voles.....Scott McKay
Gilbert Price.....Edmon Ryan
Mrs. Fawcett....Audrey Christie
Dr. Bacher.....Robert Emhardt
The Waiter.....Joe Silver
The Musician.....Barry Newman
Rip Voorhees.....Sorrell Booke
Mrs. Voorhees.....Renee Roy
Dr. Bimber.....Ronald Long

The New York Times

October 17, 1957

Theatre: 'Nature's Way'

Herman Wouk Comedy Opens at Coronet

By BROOKS ATKINSON

BEING of the cerebral type, Herman Wouk has written a silly show, "Nature's Way," which opened at the Coronet last evening. It represents the compensation a man of intellect requires.

A young married couple faces two problems: She is pregnant; he has to write the music for a new Broadway show. Neither of these crises is as hilarious as Mr. Wouk imagines. But he keeps whacking away at them industriously as though he were writing a George Abbott farce of twenty years ago, and the actors go whooping up and down the stage as though a fire had broken out behind the wings.

•

Being by nature a man of taste, Mr. Wouk has hung some distasteful trimmings on the comedy. One of his leading characters is a homosexual who is trying to separate the young musician from his bulging wife. And in the last scene a waiter sent in from the caterer's turns out to be a homosexual also, and introduces some florid passages to the climactic merriment.

Since last evening's audience was conspicuously respectable, it laughed its head off at these bizarre deviations from the norm. For people of taste, breeding and fastidiousness have a particular relish for morbid fooling.

Donald Oenslager has provided a stunning and luxurious setting, representing a fabulously expensive penthouse well suited to the needs of a music writer who owes the Government $50,000 in taxes. Charles II would feel at home there. Although the cast includes likable actors, Alfred de Liagre Jr. has directed a stock company performance—loud, busy and over-eager.

•

Orson Bean, who plays the music writer, is a pretty funny fellow, thanks to nature's way and the improvements he has contributed by himself. His eyes are sunken. His jaw is rigid. He can also manage to look crestfallen when he is having a good time. There is a genuinely comic bit in the last act when Robert Emhardt, as a fatuous obstetrician, chases Mr. Bean around the scenery with a huge hypodermic needle in his fist, determined to sedate the prospective father. Bobby Clark and Paul McCulloch used to be great at this sort of larrikin.

But there is nothing else as hearty in "Nature's Way." Betsy von Furstenberg gives another lean, slinking, skillful performance as the impregnated bride. As the bride's mother, Audrey Christie is refreshingly normal and good-humored. She supplies the contrast that makes most of "Nature's Way" look cheap. Having had his holiday in the rumpus room, Mr. Wouk can now get back to the sort of work that becomes him.

Journal-American

October 17, 1957

Wouk Tries Hard At Being Humorous

By JOHN McCLAIN

IN the last act of Herman Wouk's new comedy, "Nature's Way," which opened at the Coronet last night, an effeminate waiter appeared on the premises and nearly but not quite made the evening worthwhile.

This character, played by Joe Silver, flits through the proceedings — uttering an occasional screech and flapping his wrists violently —and I will defy the most solid square not to be convulsed.

But this is a bit, and it cannot make up for an entire night of fairly uninspired contrivance. The basic trouble, as old as Aeschylus, is that we are never made to care particularly about the people or their improbable problems.

The scrimmage gets off the ground well enough with a whimsical pantomime by Orson Bean in the best Bean tradition.

We are even held through the introduction of his wife, Betsy von Furstenberg, and some quite humorous dialogue involving her embarrassing pregnancy and the fact that some Freudian compulsion gives her the hiccoughs whenever her husband's passion mounts.

But then I'm afraid it settles down into a series of vaudeville, or TV, episodes. There is the prop man from the Income Tax Bureau, a ridiculous doctor, a comic mother-in-law, and the evil and obviously maladjusted partner of Mr. Bean's in the book and lyrics business.

Various people open a penthouse window and let in a gale which blows everything to the ceiling; other players are required to read their lines while going through the odd doctor's exercises for natural delivery; one of them beats on the wall of the expensive brick-adorned living room, revealing a perfectly practical brick wall underneath. There is a comedy interior decorator, the usual Broadway producer with his vapid wife, a real gone saxophone player and even a London theatre critic.

There is nothing wrong with any or all of these citizens, as such, but they don't fit into a pattern that goes anywhere. The airborne waiter has only a minor plot connection, but he is singled out for being just plain mad.

I am an Orson Bean fan, and I thought he made the most of his assignment as the prodigy composer with the young wife. It is just unfortunate that, as presented, he didn't seem remotely real.

Betsy von Furstenberg, playing his bride, proved that she is a skilled and brittle operator with the polite, or impolite, ripost—but she seemed as ill-at-ease as the audience at some of the contortions she was obliged to endure.

Audrey Christie made the most of a fairly thumb-rule mother-in-law's role, Scott McKay was excellent as a decadent-type Southern author, and Robert Emhardt and Edmon Ryan filled in courageously in parts which might have been more plausible. Joe Silver, as stated, was merely hilarious.

Mr. Wouk, the man who rewarded us all with "The Cain Mutiny," has herewith reverted to broad comedy. He establishes the fact that he can write many an amusing line, that his sense of the grotesque is intact, but he hasn't given us a cohesive comedy in "Nature's Way."

Daily Mirror

October 17, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN'S THEATRE

'Nature's Way' Poor Farce

We tuned up our set of bells for ringing, donned our dancing shoes, and dusted off some of our choicest superlatives Wednesday evening. All by way of celebrating the arrival of "Nature's Way" at the Coronet Theatre. For it was penned by Herman Wouk, who gave us "The Caine Mutiny," and produced by Alfred de Liagre, Jr., a showman of intelligence.

These proved futile exercises, however, as the farce represented author and sponsor caught off first and second while attempting to score a run on an out. If there's a lesson to be learned from this attempt, it is that old pros with a knack for belting out hits can be just as human and fallible as the rest of us on the Broadway base paths.

THE TROUBLE WITH "Nature's Way" is that it's one of those scripts fashioned around a single joke. In this instance, pregnancy. Wouk seeks to have fun with a temperamental pair that decides their baby shall be delivered via modern methods. When the gag starts to run as thin as over-watered pancake batter, an echelon of indoor aviators is sent flying on stage to save day and play.

Unfortunately, they are able to do neither. But the brittle brigade does have a perfectly dandy time of it wrecking a weirdie of a penthouse setting by Donald Oenslager. They send powdery plaster spraying right out into the audience, to the detriment of susceptible sinuses, and Wouk's contrivances sprawling onto the boards.

As usual, impresario de Liagre has signed a cast of expert pretenders to sashay through the shenanigans. Orson Bean, as a bashful composer and harrassed husband, proves superior to the part. In fact, he turns in one of his most winning characterizations, with no straw for the bricks.

Betsy von Furstenberg is attractive as his suspicious spouse, who finds Nature a better midwife than a high-priced specialist with faddish ideas. Robert Emhardt, a valuable trouper to have around in the clutch, literally knocks himself out impersonating the slap-happy obstetrician.

AUDREY CHRISTIE, who can turn a dubious chuckle into a gilt-edged howl, has a field day as an old-fashioned mom with an appreciation for a Dior gown and a frown for late Picasso. Scott McKay, Edmon Ryan, Beatrice Arthur, James Arenton, Joe Silver, Barry Newman, Sorrell Booke and Ronald Long also labor valiantly on behalf of a flamboyant collection of eccentrics.

It is Miss Christie's duty, somewhere along the line, to observe: "I know a spade when I see one." And we couldn't help thinking: we know a cliche when we hear one.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 17, 1957

Laughs Arrive In Stork Style

By FRANK ASTON.

The unwritten rule book of the stage states that pregnancy, like gout and a hangover, is irresistibly funny. The volume further declares that incessant laughter is guaranteed when the pregnancy, with gay innocence, precedes the nuptials and the prospective mother is associated with a tunesmith, a show writer, a producer, a hungry drama critic, a Wild West mama and other personalities assumed to be innately mad.

At the Coronet, where "Nature's Way" by Herman Wouk opened last evening, the formula seemed to work, no matter how grimy this fact may feel to those of disciplined tastes.

The author and the director, Alfred de Liagre Jr., must have collected for this biological whimsy by firing scatter guns in all directions at anything that looked like a possible snort, haw, grin or giggle.

'Aw Gee' Breed.

They started with an "aw gee" breed of song writer who finds himself burdened with a Manhattan apartment, two Picassos, an unexpected income tax debt of $50,000, his first Broadway hit and a bride wearing clothes described in the cloying school of copy as "for the lady in waiting." Incidentally these look pretty on Betsy von Furstenberg, as what wouldn't?

The boy's collaborator is a Sybarite making a fetish of decadence and insisting the two of them go to Venice where they will be inspired to write another hit. So in come the girl's Arizona mother, a comedy doctor, a horsey lady decorator who believes in brick walls for penthouse living rooms, a hep cat saxophonist, a waiter who's really an artist—but never mind.

People In and Out.

What matters is that people rush in and out, a man stands on his head for relaxation, the terrace door admits disastrous gales, people with guilty consciences hiccup at embarrassing moments, bricks tumble and the characters are bountifully supplied lines like "a girl needs experience to be naive."

This goes on in one of Donald Oenslager's handsome living rooms with major chores falling to Orson Bean, Miss von Furstenberg, Audrey Christie, Scott McKay, Robert Emhardt and Edmon Ryan. Make no mistake about it, they are highly competent in the laugh department. There's nothing wrong with the affair except that it's aimless, strenuous and intellectually pitched for folks who go into hysterics at the sight of a bride eating a pickle.

New York Post
October 17, 1957

TWO on the AISLE

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

Antics of the Theatrical Set

Herman Wouk, it appears, disapproves of tranquilizer drugs, fashionable obstetricians, interior decorators, television producers, penthouses, the income tax and Tennessee Williams. He has other dislikes, too, but these should provide some idea of their extent. And you will find all of them targets for his scorn in his new comedy, "Nature's Way," which opened last night at the Coronet Theater. It is quite an energetic prank that he has devised for the expression of his frank and wholesale distaste, but I must confess that I didn't find it very funny.

Why is it that the dramatists of today refuse to describe a play of theirs as a farce? It used to be a perfectly respectable theatrical category, but it has certainly fallen into disrepute. "Nature's Way" has all those elements of pace, extravagance of humor, violent physical activity, caricatured types and general heartiness that once came under this now outlawed classification, but the program insists on calling it a comedy. It seems to me a mistake, because it is at its best when the action is going in for pleasant extremes.

The Audition

In the last scene, for example, there is a party given for an audition of the musical play written by two of its central figures, and I thought it provided the happiest moments of the evening. This is because, in authentically farcical fashion, several extraneous characters prowl about, including a swishing waiter who turns out to be a better obstetrician than the official one, a musician given to jive talk, a patronizing television producer and his idiot wife, and a hungry English drama critic, and they are far more comic than the plot.

This plot, it is high time to tell you, has to do with a young playwright and his wife, and their problems when a baby and a big income tax rap are on the verge of arriving almost simultaneously. The dramatist has a precious collaborator who is trying to break up his marriage, and the wife gets hiccups when something displeases her, and the musical play turns out to be about decadence in the South, and things look fairly desperate for the young couple. Meanwhile, Mr. Wouk is getting in his digs at the lunatic fringe of metropolitan culture.

General Effect

There is no doubt about his ability to write some good, savage comic lines, either. Nor would I deny that many of his satirical targets seem to me deserving of the blows he deals them so zestfully. Finally, those minor characters on the outskirts of the plot are decidedly helpful. It was clear last night that many in the audience were having a far better time than I was. But my impression is that a remarkably small amount of genuine festivity emerges from all the uproar and that the general effect was fairly depressing.

As usual, the performances were not to blame. Orson Bean as the innocent playwright, Betsy von Furstenberg as the pregnant wife, and Scott McKay as the unbearable collaborator did everything possible, with Mr. McKay even standing on his head in the interests of his art. Audrey Christie, as the wife's sensible mother, was especially good, and there was helpful work by Edmon Ryan as a sympathetic theatrical producer, Robert Emhardt as the obstetrician, Joe Silver as the waiter, and Barry Newman as the musician. But "Nature's Way" is far from one of Mr. Wouk's triumphs.

DAILY NEWS
October 17, 1957

Wouk's Comedy, 'Nature's Way,' Tilts Gaily at Many Windmills

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Producer-director Alfred de Liagre Jr. assembled a delightfully amiable and able company of comedians for last evening's premiere of Herman Wouk's play, "Nature's Way." And the play itself was intelligent and funny, but never quite sure if it should be a comedy or a farce.

The actors include Orson Bean and Betsy von Furstenberg as the principal antagonists — Bean a mint specimen of the agonized male, Miss von Furstenberg a cool, precise comedienne. There are Audrey Christie as a breezy Arizona mother-in-law, Scott McKay as a faintly epicene musical comedy librettist, Edmon Ryan as a level-headed showman and Robert Emhardt as a breezy obstetrician who believes in "natural" birth—a term which puzzles Miss Christie because she hasn't heard of any other way of turning this trick.

Two Funny Men

Also to be counted is Beatrice Arthur in the role of a domineering interior decorator. But the cream of the jesters are a pair of actors playing character bits—Joe Silver as a pansy waiter who bakes ceramics and delivers babies on the side and Barry Newman as a jazz musician who looks as though he had been sired in a muddled moment by Robert Sylvester.

The author, Wouk, crams some crafty comment into his comedy. Basically it is a Mama Loves Papa affair in which Bean and Miss Furstenberg are about to become parents two months ahead of schedule, wedding time. He has written the music for a smash hit, so they live luxuriously in a penthouse designed by Donald Oenslager. And they quarrel, of course.

Covers Ground

Incidentally, the play considers such items as the income tax, home furnishings, Yoga, medical theories, psychosis, tranquilizers and stimulants. It finishes by depicting a part of show business which, thanks be to Allah and his prophet Mohammed, a drama critic knows little of—the audition for backers. Bean and McKay, having written one hit, now have tried to write another.

Most of "Nature's Way" is bright and much of it is funny, but its author really didn't have to joust with so many windmills in one theatrical evening . . . and he and his director should have made up their minds which it was to be—a comedy or a farce.

"Under Milk Wood"

DAILY NEWS

October 16, 1957

'Under Milk Wood' a Lovely and Mildly Theatrical Stage Poem

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It is inescapable that the late Dylan Thomas' play, "Under Milk Wood," which was given a lovely production at Henry Miller's Theatre last evening, should be compared with Thornton Wilder's "Our Town." Both plays concern the life and lives of a small town as they are observed by a narrator.

The Wilder work was almost as sparing of its language as it was of its scenery—which was nothing. The Thomas work is an indubitably beautiful and linguistically ornate poem. Wilder offered no imagery, no flights of fancy, but stuck to the facts of an American town. He let the audience summon whatever images and fancies it chose.

In "Under Milk Wood" Thomas, with a very rare gift for making words sparkle and sing, presented the facts of a Welsh town in the manner of his own choosing. Last night's production was in keeping with the poet's scheme as it strove for visual as well as aural beauty.

The Better Poet

In my mind, Wilder, even though he avoided verse and beautiful words, was the better poet—for the stage at any rate. The material he gave his narrator was threaded by a touching story, whereas Thomas' narrator finds himself without much of a narrative. All he can do is tell, scene by scene, small and disconnected incidents in a town in the "milk wood" time of spring.

There is much beauty in "Under Milk Wood," and the second of its two acts is more theatrically effective than the first. It is quite admirably done by a large company which manages by doubling roles, to represent a sizable community and all its hopes, fears and disillusionments. As the narrator and Thomas' spokesman, Donald Houston does a beautiful job, catching the lilt, the zest and the insight of the poet's words. He is, as Thomas was, a storyteller.

Shows Devotion

Among many other attractive performances are those of Diana Maddox, as a girl who has known many but loves only one who is dead; Francis Compton as a blind old sea captain whose dearest memory is his recollection of a trollop of long ago, and Powys Thomas as a minister who has a very small gift for verse.

Raymond Sovey's setting catches the practicality but not the essential beauty of the author's many images. Gilbert Miller, Henry Sherek and Roger L. Stevens have presented "Under Milk Wood" and have thus shown an admirable devotion to the theatre. My reluctant estimate is that audiences may not show similar devotion.

"UNDER MILK WOOD"

Play by Dylan Thomas in two acts; staged by Douglas Cleverdon; settings by Raymond Sovey; costumes by Kathryn Miller; presented by Gilbert Miller, Henry Sherek and Roger L. Stevens at Henry Miller's Theatre, October 15, 1957. The cast: Donald Houston, Diana Maddox, Francis Compton, Powys Thomas, Catherine Dolan, Joan Newell, Buddug-Mair Powell, Guy Spaull, Alastair Duncan, Lisa Daniels, Pirie MacDonald, Richard Longman, Charles Tyner, Walter Thomson, Donald Ewer, Olive Dunbar, Muriel Ault, Christine Thomas, Pauline Flanagan, Carson Woods, Suzanne Shell, Peggy Turnley, Audrey Ridgwell, Donald Moffat, Tom Clancy, Patricia Devon, Toby Stevens, Dorothy Rice, Raymond McHugh, Katharine Dunfee, Tony Atkins and Ina Beth Cummins.

Daily Mirror

October 16, 1957

ROBERT COLEMAN'S THEATRE

Thomas Play too Macabre

Like most Welshmen, the late Dylan Thomas was in love with words and music. He was a poet with a gift for catching characters in nets of verse. At his best, he could be dramatic and moving. In off moments, his verbosity and coyness could tax your patience, and make you groan as though in the throes of the flu.

During his brief and brilliant life, he became something of a cult. He developed a loyal following that would swallow every one of his lines with the avidity of fish snapping at hooks, cleverly or clumsily baited. They were in love with the man as well as his works. And the cult persists.

THIS IS ALL by way of saying that Gilbert Miller, Henry Sherek and Roger L. Stevens—gentlemen of discrimination and taste—gave a posthumous production to the gifted Thomas' "Under Milk Wood" at Henry Miller's Theatre Tuesday evening. There were those in the initial audience, we noted, who sat tensely forward in their seats to catch every syllable of it.

There were also those who looked as though they were eyeing the nearest exists, and plotting quick getaways. Frankly, after about half an hour of the master's windy and salty flights of fancy we were of a mind to join the latter. We can take just so much of this kind of thing, and then start recalling that Shakespeare was a poet and dramatist, too. So are T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry.

In "Under Milk Wood," Thomas, in the role of eavesdropper, makes a "midnight-to-midnight prowl of a seedy Welsh fishing village." In a round of vignettes,he brings to life its lecherous and larcenous inhabitants. They're a loutish lot, selfish, gamey, eating of offal that would turn the stomach of a fastidious buzzard.

We've probably been reading too many brochures from Britain's Tourist Bureau, for we've been under the impression that the Welsh are a practical yet quaintly moonstruck, a realistic yet eloquent people. It took one of their favorite sons to brand them as "gaudy, bawdy and macabre."

Under Douglas Cleverdon's accurate direction, the largest cast of the season etches the village "idlers, soaks, gossips and philanderers" with arresting strokes. In Raymond Sovey's peripatetic settings and Kathryn Miller's atmospheric costumes, such expert mimes as Diana Maddox, Francis Compton, Powys Thomas, Catherine Dolan, Joan Newell, Buddug-Mair Powell, Guy Spaull, Alastair Duncan and Lisa Daniels trenchantly satirize the eccentricities and depravities of Llareggub's victims of Spring.

WE WERE PARTICULARLY impressed by Donald Houston, as the Onlooker, a role something like Thornton Wilder's Narrator in "Our Town." It seemed evident that Houston was impersonating Thomas, as a wry and cynical observer of local mores.

According to Dick Maney's program biography, Houston has tackled some of the most formidable and challenging assignments in British drama with distinction.

If you be a pessimist, a Stoic or devotee of Dylan Thomas, you may well relish "Under Milk Wood." We happen to be a pessimistic-optimist, one who can take just so much of a dip into the lower depths at a sitting, and an advocate of D. T. at his best. Unfortunately, the legendary D. T., in our book, is too edgy and episodic this time out for comfort.

New York Post
October 16, 1957

TWO on the AISLE

By RICHARD WATTS Jr.

Dylan Thomas' 'Under Milk Wood'

It is hardly a secret these days that the late Dylan Thomas was a dark and brooding poet of enormous distinction, who combined earthiness and lyricism in terms of vigorous beauty. Thanks in large part to the recent ministrations of Emlyn Williams, we also know he was a superb humorist. Possibly, therefore, you should go to the Henry Miller's Theater, where his "Under Milk Wood" opened last night, and see for yourself how he could employ his vast talents when he used them to dramatize a day and night in a Welsh seacoast village.

If this advice seems a little hesitant, it is not because I am trying to evade my obligations as an adviser to playgoers. It is entirely because one's response to "Under Milk Wood" is likely to depend on what is being sought for in the theater. My own belief is that, despite the haunting lyricism, the moments of moving loveliness, and the grim humor of this strange work, it is too piecemeal in its dramatic interest and too lacking in cumulative theatrical power to be satisfying on the stage. But there is no denying its distinguished beauty.

High Moments

There are times when this beauty is truly dramatic; moments of heartbreak, of sensitive insight, of brooding sadness, of sardonic laughter, and of rowdy mirth. Or Mr. Thomas could write a little song for a girl with the memory of many lovers or for a group of schoolchildren, perhaps a song not without its trace of that rich earthiness of his, and make it wonderfully touching. He could set down a scene about a blind old sea captain dreaming of his youth, and make it deeply moving, or show you a husband longing to poison his wife, and make it hilarious.

All of these things, and many others, are enormously good, and I like the way in which he opens "Under Milk Wood," showing the people of the village in their beds at night and then revealing them to us in their wild, comic or agonized dreams. So simple a matter as a husband and wife laughing the next morning about the husband's drunken conduct the night before can be amazingly fine. Yet I can't get over the feeling that the brilliance of its individual episodes doesn't quite atone for the lack of a central driving force in its narrative.

A Comparison

If you are looking for some comparison of the form of Mr. Thomas' play with another celebrated dramatic work, you are driven inevitably to Thornton Wilder's "Our Town." In both of them, an entire community is the collective hero, and both are presided over by a commentator who serves as a sort of cosmic master of ceremonies. But there are also greater differences than the fact that one village was in New England, and the other is in Wales. "Our Town" had more compelling dramatic effectiveness; "Under Milk Wood" has richer verbal beauty.

A large cast plays a vast number of roles in the narrative, and everyone seemed to me excellent. Although Emlyn Williams has perhaps made it a bit difficult for us to accept another actor as a Dylan Thomas commentator, Donald Houston is admirable in this capacity, while Francis Compton, as the blind sea captain, and Diana Mattox, as the girl of many sweethearts, are especially good. I also liked Richard Longman and Pauline Flanagan as the would-be poisoner and spouse. Douglas Cleverdon's staging is resourceful. 'Maybe you should see "Under Milk Wood."

New York World-Telegram
and
The [illegible] Sun

October 16, 1957

Thomas Lures Eye and Ear

By FRANK ASTON.

"Under Milk Wood," by Dylan Thomas, written originally for England's radio, became something for the eye as well as the ear last evening at the Henry Miller.

The eye has its opportunity in Raymond Sovey's stageful of sets-within-a-setting which, without sacrifice of grace, has the mass and ingenuity to accommodate swift and numerous changes of scene. A light discloses an old sea captain on a balcony, little curtains part to provide peeps into privacy, a split level leads under trees, across clover and among lovers.

Mr. Sovey makes countless items visible to the naked eye, but one should expect to use an inner eye to get the most from the "visual poetry" of this stage version. One should see the sea barking with seals, the 66 nonexistent clocks of a crazy man, the face of a pig smiling in sweet slumber, the uxoricidal hopes of a hen-pecked husband.

March of Aspirations.

The ear meanwhile isn't supposed to loaf. It is to hear the march of men's aspirations and despair, the heart calls of a lowly boy and a well-born girl, the blessed indifference of a husband to his wife's prattle, the granite discipline a widow once exercised over husbands now buried.

Eyes and ears, you see, are put to it to keep up with imagination throughout the performance of this solidly packed consignment of small, individual images, episodes, implications, and great clouts of raffish humor.

Vestigial traces of radio structure remain. For one thing, Donald Houston, a good man to teach elocution teachers, devotes himself to introducing, explaining, echoing and guiding the voices toward understanding. Douglas Cleverdon has arranged rapid speeches in a form almost contrapuntal so that if you were to close your eyes (listen by radio) your ears would behold. And the unaccompanied songs by Diana Maddox and a group of playing children would doubtless be satisfactory if one heard but did not see the performers.

Standout Scenes.

A few of the scenes last long enough to assume individual stature, notably the one between Francis Compton and Catherine Dolan in which an ancient sea captain talks in fancy with the girl he loved and lost long ago.

The players as a group came through admirably last evening in illustrating the poet's sardonic, coarse, whimsical affection for all kinds of people. The production probably will appeal only to a fringe of the ticket-buying public, with most people saying it should not even be called a play. But that fringe will like it a lot.

The New York Times
October 16, 1957

The Theatre: The Town a Poet Built

'Under Milk Wood,' by Dylan Thomas, Staged

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WHY the scenery? For Dylan Thomas wrote his poem, "Under Milk Wood," for the radio, which is sightless. He created a town in words.

At Henry Miller's Theatre, where it opened last evening, "Under Milk Wood" is now presented as a play. It would be impossible not to admire the excellence of the acting and the stagecraft. The poem is descriptive, expository and narrative. It is unified by the mind of the "Onlooker," who is really Dylan Thomas looking with his welkin eye on Llareggub, South Wales, on a day in spring, conjuring up people, sound and sensations in a torrent of racy words.

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Under the imaginative direction of Douglas Cleverdon, the Onlooker is played by Donald Houston, and played magnificently withal. Although his part must mark some sort of record for length, Mr. Houston has gathered it into a genial, flowing, casual comment on the follies of the townsfolk. And although the poetry is compact with Elizabethan-like images, Mr. Houston gives it the space and lightness of colloquial talk. It has style but it is never studied or formal.

As he sets the stage, the characters of the town take over in bits and pieces in the corners of Raymond Sovey's descriptive set. If the characters are earthy and pungent in the Thomas poem, you can

Production Directed by Douglas Cleverdon

depend on the vitality of the characterizations. They are, for the most part, superb cameos. Francis Compton's ruminative sea captain with his ribald memories; Diana Maddox' bucolic Polly Garter with loose habits and a pure spirit; Powys Thomas' venerable, compassionate parson; Guy Spaull's vulgar butcher; Alastair Duncan's rapturous clerk in love with an ideal—these are only a few of the characterizations, but they have depth and clarity on the wing.

Credit Mr. Cleverdon also for the ingenuity with which he has summoned the characters off the printed page onto the stage. There is nothing literal about the staging. Each episode, no matter how trivial, has an original rhythm or accent. Some of them, like the children's songs and dances, have exquisite lyrical beauty; and Polly's reverie on her favorite lovers has the sweet daintiness of a song from Shakespeare.

And yet, alas, the staged version of "Under Milk Wood" is a work of art torn out of context. It is the portrait of a town broken into little pieces. It is busy and diffuse. Instead of capturing the languid, meditative mood of a town seen from a long distance, it breaks in small fragments, and the town seems to be frenetic and shrill.

Compare it to the simplicity and leisure of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town," which was written for the stage, and you will see how far this theatricalized "Under Milk Wood" strays from the theme. The Dylan Thomas words are there—lusty, humorous, passionate, mischievous, probing and loving. But the stage pictures are distracting. The solidity of the poem is shattered. The great image of a breathing, living, aimless community has been reduced in size and beauty.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
October 16, 1957

THEATER

'Under Milk Wood'

By WALTER KERR

WHAT kind of a primitive was Dylan Thomas, anyway? Was he, when he first wrote the radio play "Under Milk Wood," a primitive in the sense that he was willing to examine the sound of words all over again, bounce them like gaily-colored rubber balls as high as they would go in the sunlit air, willing to give them the sort of fond and cheekily familiar nudge that would send them spilling and tumbling in childlike disarray over cobble-stoned streets to the sea?

Was he a primitive in the sense that he eternally longed to dip backward in time, long enough at least to catch the fishing-village smells and the spinster sighs and the lusty nightmares of very small people in very small rooms?

Or was he a Keystone Cop primitive, a collector of enormous false mustaches, straggly wigs, blacked-out front teeth, and violently red noses? Someone connected with the current theatrical arrangement of Mr. Thomas' justly celebrated poem has come out flat-footed and bandy-legged for this last point of view.

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As we listen for the heartbeat of a snug Welsh village during a single restless night and a single seething day ("you can hear the dew falling and the hushed town breathing," the narrator tells us), we are treated to some startlingly coarse-grained images: figures in long white nightgowns hurtling violently into the wings, a 'treasure' of a maidservant flipped offstage by a vaudeville arm, a fright-wigged slattern reading a letter upside down, a Cook's Tour guide announcing that the community has somehow kept "abreast of the times" and accompanying the announcement with just the gesture you expected—and didn't want.

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It is possible that a certain amount of this clodhopping farce honestly belongs to Thomas: the Welshman had a passion for grotesquerie and a taste for plain salt that must be counted among his most vigorous virtues.

But if this crude cartooning does belong, it must somehow or other be embraced, invited in, made comfortably at home among the quieter, more yearning, more compassionate moods of the evening. It isn't, not by a long shot.

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"Under Milk Wood" is, at root, a piece of music. Dozens of grace-notes, and even isolated chords, are struck: a sea-captain dreaming of the dead, a draper promising to lie beside his wife like the Sunday roast, a schoolteacher waiting to be lusted after, a lunatic eating out of a dog's dish while his sixty-six clocks strike the time, children playing a kissing-game.

What is clearly wanted to bind these fragments together is orchestration, a series of related harmonies that will rise and swell and break until we are moved. Director Douglas Cleverdon does not manage the fusion. The farce hacks harshly in one direction; the liquid language of the narration ripples in another; when sentiment comes, it comes as a surprise.

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The occasion has its successes. Diana Maddox' dreamily promiscuous Polly Garter, for instance, is an immediate, and a lasting, delight. When she is through singing of the Toms, Dicks, and Harrys who have been second-best lovers, you are willing to join in a passer-by's murmured "Praise the Lord, we are a musical nation!" Francis Compton's cry for his lost and love-warmed youth, Powys Thomas' prayer for the welcome dawn, Lisa Daniel's shudder as she passes her furtive suitor's ale-house, Donald Houston's mocking of a would-be poisoner—all of these summon up a twilit, half-remembered, secretly savage world.

But they are suggestions for a production that has not yet been granted us. The mixture at the Miller is disconcertingly uneven.